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POOR WYKHOFF JONES!

By Mrs. Metta Victoria Victor,
AUTHOR OF "STILTS OF GOLD"—"HIGH LIFE TRAGEDY"
—"STARTING THE PAPER," ETC., ETC.

PART I.—THE COURTSHIP.

THEY had stolen apart from the careless crowd,
Whose heads were whirling with waltz and wine;
Music and dancing were all too "loud"
For the breathing of sentiments so divine—
Conversing together in undertones
Were Amaranth Crispin and Wykhoff Jones,
Where the light streamed through a yellow silk curtain,
Very becoming and very uncertain.
He lounged, in an easy and graceful style,
On a satin sofa, his eyes cast down,
While a tender and half-triumphant smile
Conquered an imperceptible frown.
She stood beside and bent above him,
Her very attitude breathing—"I love him!"
"Oh, say," she whispered in softest tone,
"Dear Wykhoff, say thou wilt be mine own!"

He paused, as a modest young man might,
Twirled his moustache, through his hair
Ran his fingers, slender and fair,
As doves glance through the darkling night.
She patted her foot impatiently—
The diamonds quivered upon her breast—
With the tremulous play of a silent sigh
The rich silk rustled in which she was dressed;
She bent still lower—"My own sweet Jones!"—
Who could resist those siren tones?
His silence was that of solemn thought;
His memory ran through the brilliant past:
Of the fun which money had always bought;
Of the fortune left him, "too bright to last."
He mused on the future's untold ills—
Nothing to dash on—nothing to spend—
Nothing to meet his unpaid bills—
Nothing to give a suffering friend!

He was very handsome, she very plain—
He poor, she rich—she thirty, he not—
Which of the two had the most to gain
May be revealed at the end of the plot.
He raised his eyes with a pensive glance—
"Sweetest," she said, "you've splendid eyes!"—
He looked at her Jewelled throat askance,
"I am very young"—he murmured and sighs.—
"I cannot marry, to be tied down,
To cut my friends, to clip my wings,
To be joked by the fellows about the town
As tied to a woman's apron-strings."
"You shall not be—oh, never! oh, no!
You shall have money, all you can spend;
A thousand dollars a month, or so,
Just for pocket-money, you know,
And you need not cut your fastest friend.
You shall do just as you please, my pet—
Say 'Yes'—the word you will never regret."

"I'd like to specify certain things,"
The youth remarked, as he turned the rings
Which sparkled upon her wooing hand,
While Amaranth listened serene and bland.—
"A horse or two, you know, and a yacht,
A room at the Club, and —" "Say no more—
I'd rather you'd have these things than not,
That men may envy what women adore.
Then, Wykhoff, say, you'll be really mine!"
"Yes, dearest Crispin, entirely thine!"
"Ah! precious boy! and the happy day?"
"Whenever my fair friend chooses to say."

The music burst forth exultingly loud
As the happy lovers rejoined the crowd.
As a mother may beam on her lovely child,
So Amaranth Crispin beamed and smiled
On the dainty young man whose arm she held.
Oh, sweet young man! he never rebelled,
Though she clasped it close and whispered low,
And shone triumphant and talked to him—so!
He thought of his yacht and her doubloons bright,
And took it all as an angel might.
The crowd smiled pleasantly at the sight—
But one young face turned suddenly white;
One plainly attired but beautiful form
Drooped like a rose in a beating storm;
One sweet, reproachful, suffering look
The soul of the youth for an instant shook.

PART II.—THE MARRIAGE.

Well, they were married: a pensive grace
Pervaded the youthful bridegroom's face.
He'd a touching way, the women all said,
Of repeating the ritual the pastor read;
His low, soft voice, and his white silk vest,
His look half happy and half distressed,
And the very becoming way he was dressed!
Miss Crispin, afterward Mrs. Jones,
Sparkled all over with precious stones,
Like the midnight sky with its million stars.
Her nose peered out of her bridal veil
Like a parrot's out of its silver bars—
She looked more yellow than she did pale.
She'd a diamond wreath upon her head,
And pigeon-egg pearls around her neck,
While numberless smaller pearls did flock
The Honiton gown in which she was wed.
The furthestmost pew might have heard her say
Those agreeable words—"love, honor, obey"—
But the way she kept them—oh, the way!

The liberal bride, in a handsome way,
Took her husband off on a bridal tour;
Newport, Nahant, Lake George, Cape May,
Did each a share of the spoils secure.
When the loving, lingering honeymoon
Went by with the summer's withering flowers,
And the breath of the chill October too soon
Drove the last butterflies out of her bowers,

The wedded couple returned to town
Light of heart as the thistle down.

Light of heart and heavy of purse!
As Wykhoff said when he once more met
The favorite boys of his ancient set—
"Matters might be a great deal worse.
Plenty of money agreed with him—
Plenty of money and never a trouble;
With a nice old girl to humor each whim,
When he asked a trifle to give him double—
Turtle soup in gold tureens, and all that,
Was famous for making a fellow fat!"

Nevertheless, it was very plain
That this fortunate youth grew thin again.
Every month as it rolled away
Found him meeker and more sedate,
Resigned, as it were, to a secret fate;
The words were few which he had to say,
He gave no suppers, he did not play,
His drives were few and far between,
While his face at the Club was seldom seen.
One thing—he was always richly dressed—
Gloves, hat, and boots were the very best;
Exquisite trousers and coats he wore—
But, ah, he was Wykhoff Jones no more!—
Once the wittiest, boldest, and sauciest one,
Who ever did what he shouldn't have done.

By Christmas time he began to fail;
By Lent he looked like a lily frail;
What could, inquired the world, be the matter
With a man who lived in a marble palace,
Who eat his fish from a silver platter,
And drank his wine from a golden chalice?
Some thought it must be, beyond a question,
That he lived too well for a good digestion:
Some excellent ladies trusted his wife
Had won him to leave past sins in the lurch;
That he soon would be leading a worthier life,
Buying a pew and supporting the church.
Yet nobody settled the matter for certain,
For Wykhoff let no one behind the curtain.

A year it was since the wedding day,
A lovely time in the month of June;
A light breeze rippled the azure bay
Whose waves were "singing a pleasant tune."
Mrs. and Mr. Jones were at home,
Sitting alone in their airy chamber,
Watching the distant ocean foam,
The sapphire waves, the sunlight amber,
And the darling yachts, those cunning loves,
Spreading their wings like a flock of doves—
"My dear," said Jones, with a facial quiver,
While his eyes were turned to the sparkling river,
"You remember it, plainly, do you not?
That you promised to buy me a lovely yacht.
Jenkins and Brown have built one, new,
And they are not, both of them, rich as—you.
I wouldn't have married you—no I'd not,
If it hadn't been for that promised yacht!"

There's a trim little craft for sale, I hear,
 For six thousand dollars—cheap, my dear!"

Coolly and softly her laughter rings—
 "Husbands are such extravagant things!"

"But you know you said—" "Oh, yes, I know!
 I was rather foolish a year ago.

If you had a boat you might get drowned"—
 ("I wish I might!" was the half-breathed sound)—

"And my darling's body might never be found—
 It is not well for you reckless boys
 To be risking yourselves in such pretty toys."

"But, madame, your word!"—"Mere lover's vows,
 Which never are kept by a sober spouse."

"You promised me horses!" cried hapless Jones,
 In the bitterest bitter of biting tones,

"Yet I cannot ever go to ride
 Unless I am perched by my lady's side!
 The horses, the carriage, the driver, she owns,
 And I must ride out with my lady Jones!"

"Certainly, love; no woman of sense
 Would allow her husband so good a pretence
 For betting and racing and such impropriety.—
 A married man should select his society.
 Fast horses, indeed! you might break your neck!"—

("I would it were broken!" poor Wykhoff sighed)—

"And my happiness then would be a wreck:
 A widow instead of a blushing bride."

"Don't speak of blushing—you're too antique
 For the bloom to rise on your lovely cheek;
 Why did I marry?—aye, there's the rub!"—

"Perhaps," she remarked, "on account of the Club!"

"The Club! yes, madame, I've had to resign;
 I could not even pay up for the wine."

"Ah, sweet! the Club is with danger rife
 To the peace and repose of a faithful wife.

How could I tell, in my house up town,
 As I sat in tears and a dressing-gown,
 Till you came home from that naughty place,
 Whether some woman was not in the case?
 You're quite too handsome, Wykhoff, my own,
 To be trusted abroad too much alone.

Don't get excited, my dear, and swear—
 You've plenty to eat and plenty to wear.

Now, Wykhoff, darling, don't tear your hair:
 If you married me, you need not rue it;
 You're very well off, if you only knew it.—
 You are tied to a woman's apron-strings;
 But golden strings are not very bad things,
 And a great deal better than leaden wings.

If you had been willing to work like a man,
 You might have married your charming Fan;
 Have bought her dresses, and blessed her lot,
 And earned her bread—but you know you were not.

So Fan is growing a sad old maid—
 Her ringlets get thin and her roses fade.
 Its quite the fashion for idle young men
 To marry a fortune—a chivalrous plan!
 Girls pretty and poor don't like it, but then
 It suits the tastes of a modern young man!

I've heard that Fanny is in a decline;
 I saw her at Mrs. Fitzhugh's *soirée*;
 Her blue eyes over her thin cheeks shine,

And she looks at a person in *such* a way.
 Don't, Wykhoff, don't fumble my curtains so;
 And let the end of that tassel go.

I know I'm ugly, I know I'm old—
 You knew it, too, before you consented
 To barter your youth and beauty for gold;
 And it's hardly proper, because you've repented,
 To throw my false teeth into my face.

Don't tear the ruffle off that lace!
 It's vastly pretty to see you rave,
 Your eyes are so bright, and your sweet lips sting—
 But the truth is, Jones, if you don't behave
 I'll draw still tighter the apron-string!

PART III.—THE RESULT.

Another year crept on to the close,
 As years will do, whatever befall—
 And Fanny sleeps by the churchyard wall,
 Where the grass waves heavy, rank and tall.

Mrs. Jones is exceedingly well:
 She may be a vampire—who can tell?—
 For the thinner and paler her husband grows
 The more she blooms like a yellow rose.

She gives grand parties, also goes out;
 Her lord, so devoted, is always with her;
 Like a lamb or a poodle, he follows about
 His magnificent mistress hither and thither.

But, does he speak to a beautiful woman,
 Or waltz—he waltzes so charmingly!—
 Or do anything else that is proper and human,
 He begins to twitch most alarmingly—
 A peculiar twitching, a very strange thing,
 As if he were jerked by a viewless string.

The world remarked on this twitching complaint—
 A nervous disease, so the doctors said;
 Dyspepsia from living too well—some restraint
 For awhile would be wholesome, say, water and
 Whatever it was, 'twas a troublesome thing [bread.

To be constantly jerked by a viewless string.
 To a beautiful girl did he bow and smile,
 Jerk! he forgot what he wished to say;
 Did he talk with a friend for a little while,
 Jerk—jerk! in the most intolerable way!

No wonder he grew so thin and pale,
 Till the once familiar paving-stones
 Re-echoed no more the tread of Jones,
 And his shadow from out the earth did fall.

Jones disappeared—not even his wife
 Knew what became of him under the sun;
 With dreadful terrors her thoughts were rife,
 But she dared not breathe them to any one.

Many days went by, till an empty room,
 Which long had slept in gorgeous gloom,
 Was opened again to the garish light
 By her restless hand, and she saw—a sight!

'Twas a golden room with a carpet of gold,
 And golden tapestries, fold upon fold,
 Mirrors, golden-circled, reflecting gold—
 A room of splendor, superb to behold:

The bridal chamber, two years before,
 Of the happy man who was now no more.
 No more! for there from the gilded hook
 Whence a chandelier had recently hung,
 Cold of feature and fearful of look,
 The lifeless body of Wykhoff swung—
 A skeleton form, a frame of bones,
 The last of the witty and wicked Jones.

He hung in the place of a chandelier,
 Shut off forever life's flickering flame!
 But his light may still shine far and clear,
 A warning to those who would do the same.
 His wife fell down in a fainting fit
 When she saw his body, and also it—
 For this was the terrible joke of the thing—
 He had hung himself with an apron-string!

FINIS.

A LOVE HYMN.

By Frances Fuller Barritt

THE scented winds of night uprise, and whisper their
 soft song,
 In fragrant bowers, where fairer flowers than Flora's
 children throng—
 Dark-rob'd trees, like priests, fling up their arms in
 reverence slow,
 With incense sweet; and murmurs meet for psalms,
 fall hushed and low.

Eve soothes the warm and throbbing earth, with cool
 and sparkling dew;
 The moon, bright queen! looks on the scene, from
 realms of cloudless blue:
 In every nerve a quickening sense of beauty wakes a
 thrill—
 To die again in silent pain, a joyless pleasure still.

What care I for the fragrant winds, or night's delicious
 air?—
 It waves not now against my brow thy tresses of dark
 hair:
 How can the whispers of the trees my longing ear re-
 joice,
 Since it was filled, and tuned and thrilled, by the music
 of thy voice?

What boots it to my thirsting lips that silent dew-
 showers fall,
 While still they miss thy gentle kiss, and vainly sigh
 and call?

I name thee o'er, and o'er again, to spirits in the air:
 They but reply with sorrowing sigh unto my pleading
 prayer.

To-night when sinks the half-filled moon, my soul
 abroad shall be,
 Tracking the blue clear ether through, searching, my
 love, for thee;
 That if, allured by some fair orb, thy spirit shall have
 strayed
 Into the bright star-field of night, by daring thoughts
 betrayed,
 My soul may lead thine back to earth in loving arms
 entwined,
 And try to cheat, with whispers sweet, the star-dream
 from thy mind.

For though the earth less fair may be, it holds that
 true-love tried
 Which mates thy soul from pole to pole—thy spirit's
 love, thy bride.